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ELOQUENCE:

ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND ITS POWER.

AN ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE THALIAN AND PHI DELTA SOCIETIES OF

OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY, GEORGIA,

AT THE COMMENCEMENT, NOVEMBER 18, 1846.

BY REV. W. T. HAMILTON, D. D.

OF MOBILE, ALA.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

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PHI DELTA HALL, OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY,  
November 18, 1846.

REV. WM. T. HAMILTON, D. D.

SIR,—In accordance with a resolution of the Phi Delta Society, we, as a Committee, tender to you the thanks of said Society, for the able and classic address this day delivered before the Literary Societies, and earnestly solicit a copy for publication. Please accept the kind regards of our Society, and our individual respects.

JOHN M. SMITH,  
ALEXANDER GREENE, }  
JAMES E. WHITE. } *Committee.*

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### (REPLY.)

To MESSRS. JOHN M. SMITH, ALEX. GREENE, AND J. E. WHITE, *Committee.*

GENTLEMEN,—Your polite note, requesting for publication a copy of the Address I delivered yesterday, before the two Societies of Oglethorpe University, has just been received; and I beg leave to say in reply, that I shall take great pleasure in forwarding a copy from Mobile, as soon as practicable after my return home.

I am, Gentlemen, very respectfully, your obedt. Servt.,

WM. T. HAMILTON.

Milledgeville, Nov. 19, 1846.



## ORATION.

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GENTLEMEN OF THE THALIAN AND PHI-DELTA SOCIETIES OF  
OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY :

RE-CALLED, by my pledge, long since given, to meet you here, and thus from the magnificent scenery, the proud cities, and the glorious monuments of antiquity so abundant in the old world, it is with emotions of no ordinary character, that I find myself once more on American soil, surrounded by American institutions, and welcomed to the bosom of the hospitable society of our own sunny South. No, gentlemen, believe me, you must yourselves have wandered abroad for months, as I have done, alone, far, far from home and friends,—and among people whose institutions, whose manners, and whose very language are all foreign, if not quite strange to you, ere you can appreciate the burst of joyous emotions which swell the bosom of the wanderer, when he again finds himself at home in America.

I might, indeed, attempt to interest you by descriptions of the beauty of the Scottish Highland scenery; the splendours of the British aristocracy; the gaiety and the fascinating charms found in that city of cities, Paris, the heart of the great French empire: the matchless grandeur of the Alps, rearing their huge glacier-covered summits high in mid-heaven;—or the softness of Italian scenery, with its teeming soil, its luscious vintage, its cities coeval, almost, with the earliest records of history, its burning volcanoes, and its matchless works of art;—or I might depict the degradation of character and profligacy of morals to which I have been witness in other lands,—and seek to gratify a pardonable vanity, by exalting the institutions, and eulogizing the intelligence and indepen-

dence of our country and its citizens,—but no!—far different is my object now. I come to participate in a literary fête, and to contribute my part towards the promotion of those great interests, for the sake of which the Oglethorpe University was founded. How can I best do this? I come from the sepulchre of ancient greatness,—from the tombs of by-gone republics, to lift up my admonitory voice,—and proclaim the lesson there taught. I have visited the seat of ancient republican virtue and patriotism,—but the spirit is there no more. I have wandered in the Coliseum at Rome, I have stood in the Forum, mounted the Capitoline hill—and strolled by the banks of old Tiber—but the *Roman* is there no more. The wretched occupants of the soil—bowed to the dust by superstition, and sunk in vice—are they, *can* they be the descendants of the old Romans—those hardy masters of the world? I have wandered along the shores of the bay of Naples, matchless in beauty. I have gazed on the countless ruins of villas and palaces and cities that thickly strew the country washed by its bright waters; and the inquiry has forced itself upon me, can these miserable wretches in the form of humanity, these lazy, deceitful, treacherous, filthy lazaroni, that doze in the sunshine which glows on these ruins—that cringe so abjectly before a passing stranger in hope of a petty alms,—can these be the descendants of the noble, the accomplished Greek colonists who first settled these beautiful regions?

And shall it ever be, that here in the United States, the traveller in some future age, shall find but the monuments of past glory, haunted by a race whose personal degradation shall give the lie to the history of the greatness and prosperity of their fathers? How—oh how shall our country be saved from similar decay, and our posterity from similar deterioration? I answer—educate the people—the whole people, thoroughly, virtuously, religiously. Let our leading men look to it; let our orators master the subject fully, and discuss the matter openly, fearlessly, and everywhere. But who can be found, thus to lead and direct public opinion? Who? Who but our educated men, the graduates annually issuing from our colleges, stored with knowledge, glowing with patriotism, and trained to appreciate, and to employ the resources of oratory—the all-commanding power of eloquence, to enlighten the public mind, form public sentiment, and direct public measures. Eloquence, yes,—eloquence is the grand weapon to be employed, for the attainment of this all-important end. But eloquence!—what is it,—and where shall we find it?

Few are the words more frequently used, or more generally misunderstood—than *eloquence*. If a preacher deliver a discourse in tolerably correct language, and filled with metaphors, and bold figures, there are not wanting those who go away enraptured, exclaiming—*what an eloquent sermon we have had!* while in truth, the arguments were weak—the reasoning inconclusive—the figures ill-chosen—the metaphors confused—and the whole train of remarks bearing scarcely at all upon the point professedly aimed at. The ear was tickled with a stream of smooth paragraphs, and flowery expressions, and this is called eloquence. Or a political orator utters confidently, loudly and vociferously, a harangue, in which bold metaphors, biting sarcasm, and vehement declamation are mingled with base misrepresentation, sophistical reasoning, and coarse banter. But among his hearers will be found not a few, who, gratified to hear their own views expressed, and their prejudices flattered, will loudly trumpet the praises of their advocate as a finished orator, a most eloquent speaker; although in fact, good sense was defied, good taste outraged, and the rules of rhetorick and of logic were utterly set at nought in every paragraph of the harangue. In this age of liberal criticism, almost any speaker, however rude his manner, coarse his diction, and false his reasoning, if only he be bold, confident, loud and vehement, is sure to find admirers ready to award to him the palm of ELOQUENCE: whereas, true *eloquence* is a rare, a very rare gift. Its possession may be coveted by many—may be conceded to many,—yet it is actually held but by a few choice spirits, appearing at long intervals only. A truly eloquent man, is *one of the million!* nay, I might almost say, he is *one of ten millions!*

What, then, is eloquence? It has been variously defined, but never, perhaps, with entire success. Some tell us, it is the *art of persuasion*. But this definition is incomplete: persuasion is but one branch of eloquence. The orator thundering forth the impetuous torrent of his indignant feelings, until prosperous guilt, eushioned on the seat of authority, quails and trembles before him, is eloquent, truly eloquent; although denunciation, not persuasion, be the weapon he wields.

Others tell us that *eloquence* is the *art of speaking well and with effect—or of speaking fluently, elegantly, forcibly, appropriately, and with convincing power.* But to *convince*, is the province of reasoning, and although sound and effective reasoning is a part of eloquence, it is not the *whole*.

It is one of the weapons employed by the eloquent,—but it is not itself eloquence. A mathematical demonstration may be expressed with fluency, in elegant terms, forcible, appropriate, and most effective, because absolutely conclusive, *compelling* conviction,—yet, who would think of calling a mere mathematical demonstration eloquent. If to produce *conviction*, that the position taken by the speaker is *true*, be the great index of the eloquent, then the mathematical professor before his class, is the most eloquent of men !

I would then, define *eloquence* to be *that power by which a speaker can rivet the attention, awaken the interest, convince the judgment, and control the passions of his hearers, and bend them to his own purposes.*

Jeannie Deans (in Scott's heart of Mid Lothian) pleading (all unconscious in whose presence she stood) on behalf of her frail and hapless sister, before Queen Caroline and her ladies, in pouring forth the genuine feelings of a loving, truthful heart, uttered an appeal that abashed courtly guilt, and awakened the admiration, enlisted the sympathies and ensured the powerful patronage of the injured, but noble lady who heard her. The queen's exclamation, after a period of breathless attention to the lowly suppliant—" *This is eloquence*"—was a truthful verdict.

The clergyman who, (as it is said,) having, in the progress of his discourse, depicted with graphic power, the terrors of a storm at sea, and who (wholly absorbed in his subject) was describing the confusion and dismay of the crew, as the shattered vessel was driving before the furious blast, fast, fast on towards a lee-shore,—where, already the white foam of the breakers was seen, and the hoarse roaring of the surf was heard, and one wild shriek was rising from the affrighted crew, was suddenly interrupted by the agonized shout of a sailor present, who, in the wildest excitement, sprang forward and roared out, " *Avast, there ! let go the anchor ! or she'll strike !*—" received (however unexpectedly) the highest possible compliment to his eloquence. He had completely filled the mind of his hearer, and made to him the scene which fancy alone was picturing—*a terrible reality*. Eloquence, then, is the power to command the feelings of others, by the forcible presentation of appropriate thought. Eloquence lies in this forcible expression of appropriate thought. Elegant diction, fluent utterance, and graceful action may all accompany

eloquence and be made subsidiary to its purpose—but *true eloquence* is independent of these adjuncts. In some circumstances, *silence itself* is eloquent.

What, then, 1st, *Are the characteristics of true eloquence?*

2d, *What the qualities of the eloquent man?*

And 3d, *What are the indications of power in eloquence?*

Are the three points I propose briefly to discuss.

### I. What are the characteristics of true eloquence?

I answer, 1st—It is *intelligible*, and therefore the language of the eloquent is usually *simple*. It does not, indeed, reject ornament, but it never loads with ornament. If a man would influence others by what he has to say, his first care must be to make himself understood. Some persons are unintelligible, because they do not themselves fully understand what they discuss. Ideas dim and ill-defined in their own minds, they cannot clearly embody in language. Others love to express their thoughts in unusual terms and high-sounding phrases; their language is mere bombast, and their discourse is, consequently, unintelligible. Many are too fond of ornament;—they load their paragraphs with figures, and are so profuse in ornament, that they seem rather intent on exhibiting a parterre of flowers than in constructing a plain road that shall lead to the temple of truth. All these are serious faults, detracting from, not adding to the power of a speaker. The first object to be gained is, that we be understood, and this is best done when we express in plain and intelligible terms, the ideas that stand well defined in our own minds—using no figure for mere ornament, but only for the purpose of illustration. In narrative, in description, and even in argument, the flowers of rhetoric, moderately used, may aid us, but in the higher departments of eloquence, when strong prejudices are to be combated, when powerful passions are to be aroused and wielded, figures become of doubtful utility. The kindling interest of our own feelings will naturally discard them, and seek for expression in a plain, simple style, which sparkles and glows with its own inherent light, and cannot but be intelligible to every capacity. Lighter emotions may sport amid flowers and ornament—but strong feeling always clothes itself in plain and **obvious** language.

Again, 2d, *The language of eloquence is apposite.*

Eloquence is a spirit of varying aspect—sometimes grave, sometimes gay, sometimes playful, sometimes severe, sometimes sad and plaintive, sometimes impetuous and vehement, sometimes tender and melting. To console the bereaved mother, wringing her hands in speechless agony over the pallid corpse of her first-born, nature would instinctively impel to widely variant topics, and a very different language from that in which you would offer your congratulations to a bride smiling through her tears—or to a monarch returning in triumph from a hard-fought campaign, against the foes to his crown and his life. In very different terms, surely, would be described the death of a christian martyr at the stake, and that of a desperate ruffian at the gallows. The faults of a good man overcome by strong temptation, and the daring atrocities of the vicious revelling in crime. One mode of address may be very proper in a political assembly—which would be quite out of place in a court of justice, and still more so in the house of God. No inferior duty of an orator it is to have his whole soul imbued with the spirit of the occasion, that so his thoughts and his language may harmonize with the scene and with all the circumstances around him, that they may be appropriate to the time and the place, that he shock no one's feelings, and arouse no prejudice in any mind among those he would address. This harmony of the orator's feelings with the occasion makes all appear natural, truthful and appropriate, and gives a twofold power to all the orator may utter.

Again, 3d, *True eloquence is always earnest.*

However clear may be the reasoning of a speaker and choice his language,—however rich his figures and appropriate his illustrations, still he will fail to carry his hearers along with him, and to imbue them with his own spirit, if he be wanting in *earnestness*. The *vital power* of a speaker is *feeling*. Reasoning may convince, but it must be reasoning set forth in the tones, the look, the very attitudes of appropriate feeling—or it will not move. Heart alone can electrify heart:—It must be soul speaking to soul or power is not there. Hence the Poet's axiom “*si vis me flere, tibi prius flendum est.*” Many a well-written, well-studied piece, full of thought and abounding in excellencies, is heard with indifference or positive weariness,—simply be-

cause it is delivered in a cold, prosy manner. The speaker drinks not in the spirit of the sentiment he utters,—he throws not his whole soul into his subject; and without this earnestness of manner, and manifested intensity of interest, *eloquence* cannot be. The most effective of all addresses, delivered by the greatest orators of ancient and of modern times have been extemporaneous efforts, made on the spur of the moment, when from the interest of the occasion—the mind grasped its subject distinctly—and felt its full influence: Actual feeling threw around the arguments which the intellect furnished, a life and earnestness which nothing could resist! Every public speaker must be *conscious of this, that on occasions suddenly presenting, the pressure of necessity aroused every power to the utmost tension*—and in appeals thus made, the man surpassed himself and carried his hearers along with him,—great occasions call forth the highest exhibitions of eloquence, simply because they elicit the most vivid emotion, and make a man intensely earnest. An earnest speaker can hardly fail to be a forcible speaker. Such are the characteristics of eloquence; its *language* is *intelligible*, its *style simple*, its *topics* and its *illustrations* are *appropriate*, and its *manner is earnest*.

What, then, are the *qualifications necessary to an eloquent man.*

I answer 1st, *character*—to command the confidence and respect of his hearers.

It has been said, and not without reason, that a *good man* only *can be truly eloquent*. Certain it is, at least, that a conviction among his hearers, that the orator is *sincere* in the cause he advocates, is essential to his success. An audience will not yield to the influence of considerations which, if they deem the speaker insincere, they must suppose have failed of their influence on him who employs them. A reputed traitor could never arouse his countrymen to deeds of patriotic daring. A man of dissipated habits would make but a poor advocate of morality and strict self-government. A man's reputation in the community is the image of himself stamped by his own doings, on the mind and conscience of his fellow men. It is the echo of his life's footsteps sounding in the bosoms of those around him. It is the daguerreotyped likeness of his moral self, left by the movements of his life, upon the plates of

men's hearts;—and that living image of himself, is the interpreter of his language to his fellow men ; it is to them the expositor of his meaning, when he speaks. A man may discourse with consummate ability on any great and acknowledged duty—but in vain—so long as that duty is seen to be disregarded in his own conduct. Certain it is that the same considerations which shall be presented with persuasive power, by a man of probity and honour, will be received with indifference and undisguised contempt, from one of worthless character. An essay on the beauty of sincerity, by Iago,—on the unsuspecting confidence of true affection by Othello—on the joys of an approving conscience by Lady Macbeth,—or a dissertation on the excellence of republican institutions, from the pen of Napoleon,—might be a rare literary curiosity, but would never carry conviction to the readers. As well might Robespierre have declaimed to the sans-culottes rabble of Paris on the impolicy and wickedness of shedding blood. A stainless reputation in the orator is necessary to ensure him a respectable attention from his hearers, and their confidence in his sincerity, without which the most impressive appeals are powerless.

Further, it is necessary to the orator himself to preserve his own judgment clear and unbiased. To say nothing of the adverse influence of vicious habits on the intellectual powers, (and it is great ; producing dimness of vision, distraction of thought and instability of purpose,) the indirect influence of vice on the interests and fears of the orator must often be great. He must have a mind pure and conscience calm, or, in cases where none would suspect it—his advocacy of the right—as his own deep convictions regard it, may peril his interests and endanger his safety; it may lead him to that which shall arouse the hostility of those who are the masters of his painful secrets, and hold his honour or his interests in their power. Lord Bacon, with all his vast acquirements, must have shrunk from the investigation of a case, that involved charges of bribery ; and Charles Fox never could have done full justice to Mr. Pitt since his whole life had been devoted to opposition against the measures of Pitt's administration : nor could Edmund Burke have poured forth such a torrent of matchless eloquence against the curruption and cruelty of Warren Hastings as governor of India, had not Burke's own life been above reproach. A good reputation smooths the way of an orator's access to the feelings of his hearers. It does

not indeed furnish him with weapons, but it gives point and edge to the weapons he may have provided. But again,

2. *Knowledge is essential to the orator.*

It is evident that we cannot explain what we do not ourselves understand, that we cannot enforce what we do not appreciate. A man may be very zealous for the success of some particular cause, but he cannot act as the effective advocate of that cause, unless he has made himself fully acquainted with its nature, its bearings, and all its widely extended ramifications. It would, for example, be absurd for a man to attempt an explanation of the several theories that have been broached—as to the original creation of this earth, and the successive revolutions it has undergone, who was totally ignorant of the great facts of geology: so in the recent discussion of that question it was sheer folly for those to hope to influence the public mind as to the settlement of the Oregon question, who were totally ignorant of the history of that territory, of the treaties respecting it,—and of the great principles of international law on which the interpretation of treaties rests. A thorough knowledge of the subject discussed is demanded even for a tolerable effort at discussion;—but to form the finished orator, a wide range of knowledge is indispensable. No branch of learning is superfluous; no department of investigation but may yield valuable materials for the use of the accomplished orator. Hence the maxim laid down by Quintilian and Cicero both, “*Omnibus disciplinis et artibus, debet esse instructus orator.*” The more extensive and profound is the knowledge of an orator, the wider is the field of his vision, and the more abundant are his intellectual resources. He can draw from subjects, apparently the most remote, materials for argument, for illustration, for remonstrance or persuasion. Ideas crowd in upon his mind, and it is the province of genius to cull, to arrange and to employ them to happy effect. A man of limited information may present a distinct idea of the one point he well understands and would press upon our convictions;—he may define clearly and reason boldly—but his intellectual work appears before us solitary, unadorned and naked. Distinct it may be, and standing out in bold relief—but unattractive, like the rude tower of a dungeon keep, massive and secure, but rising naked and alone in the desert. The accomplished orator, whose mind abounds with ample stores of general information, presents the same position, equally clear, well sustained and cogent—but accompanied by so many graces and attractive ornaments of style, of thought, and of man-

ner, that we yield conviction unconsciously and with pleasure. 'Tis the same strong tower, but beheld as forming a symmetrical part of a glorious castle, rich with all the ornaments of architecture, and graced with the beauties of surrounding park, and garden, and pellucid stream, laving the solid mason-work of its base.

A 3d quality demanded in the orator is *good sense and sound discretion.*

This is valuable on many accounts, not only as a guide to select the proper time and mode of introducing a subject to the notice of others, (without which, an untimely or inappropriate introduction may bar a hearing altogether, and rivet prejudices against the cause, which, under other circumstances, were easy of removal,) but also for the guidance of the orator in the discussion itself. Any palpable violation of good taste, either in the arguments wielded, the illustrations employed, in the language in which the thoughts are conveyed, or even in the *manner* in which the language is delivered, may do infinite disservice to a noble cause, and may utterly neutralize many and rare excellencies in the speaker. Great judgment is required to adapt the subject selected, and the manner in which it is treated, to the circumstances of time and place, and to the habits, and even the prejudices of the hearers. The topics, the arguments and the illustrations that might suit well in a political assembly, would be wholly out of place in a grave legislative body; while the majesty of thought, dignity of demeanour and chastened fervour of feeling requisite in the pulpit, would be utterly inadmissible before a country jury, or at an ordinary hearing before a magistrate. Illustrations which would be just and forcible, before a body of literati, would probably be utterly thrown away in a popular harangue. As a guide on points of this nature (and they are of no mean importance) sound sense and good taste are indispensable.

A 4th qualification to produce a finished orator is, GRACEFULNESS,—under which, I would include a clear and distinct enunciation, well-modulated tones, and an animated manner, enlivened by action at once easy and natural. These are not, indeed, *indispensable* to eloquence, but they are important;—they must be combined with the other qualities already laid down, in order to form *an accomplished orator*. Strong reasoning or vivid description, combined with great earnestness and animation, may make even an uncouth speaker, truly eloquent on occasions; but he is carried through to success, by his noble qualities pre-

pondering over his defects ; he is eloquent in spite of his faults. Rid him of these faults, and his eloquence will be yet more effective still ; for we cannot yield ourselves to the full force of cogent reasoning, and impassioned appeal, when our good taste is outraged, and our feelings are lacerated by accompanying awkwardness or vulgarity. An indistinct utterance, a harsh voice, a slovenly intonation, or uncouth gestures, keep an audience in constant pain, and greatly detract from the force of the eloquent thoughts which so repulsive a medium may be conveying.

A clear voice, well modulated, and giving to every word and syllable its distinct utterance, while the beaming of the countenance, and the accompaniment of gestures appropriate and natural, at once attract the hearer, fix his attention, and open his feelings to the reception of eloquent thought, if the speaker has it to utter. And happily, few are the men whose physical organization is so defective, that they cannot become possessed of these advantages. One who cannot so control his vocal organs, as to give forth a distinct enunciation, ought never to attempt the task of public speaking. Distinct utterance once acquired, any voice may, by careful attention and diligent practice, be cultivated and improved, till it possesses sufficient compass, flexibility and power. Even a thin, weak voice, if duly managed, is no insuperable barrier to success in public speaking.

The painful efforts of Demosthenes, to master the difficulties of defective utterance are known to all. And few of us but have listened with delight to public speakers, who, in the commencement of their career, must have toiled hard to overcome the defects of nature.

For the guidance of an orator in *action*, good sense and correct taste are invaluable. Earnestness always prompts a speaker to action. The orators of Continental Europe, especially of France, employ more action than do we, or our brethren of Great Britain. Without action, the delivery of an impassioned address appears cold, unnatural and stript of its power. A happy medium between too much and too little action is desirable ;—though it may, perhaps, be asserted, that it is always safe to obey the promptings of nature, which, in moments of intense emotion, impel strongly to corresponding action. Nature is always graceful, and a speaker who, in his gestures, freely follows the impulse of nature, can hardly appear awkward.

Such are the qualifications of the finished orator. He must be accompanied by a good reputation for honour,

purity and sincerity;—he must have extensive information and varied knowledge;—he must possess sound sense and good taste;—and he must not be awkward;—but he must enunciate distinctly, and in well-modulated tones, accompanied by an easy and a natural gesticulation.

I hasten, then, to speak, as I proposed, of

III. *The Power of Eloquence*, which is seen in its effects; for

1st. *It disarms prejudice.*

A skillful orator will aim, not only to master thoroughly his subject, but also to possess himself of the views, the sentiments, and the very prejudices of his audience, that he may imperceptibly gain on their confidence, and allay, or if possible, eradicate those prejudices.

This is a paramount duty in an orator; for, so long as prejudice unallayed fills the minds of his hearers, his arguments will be unappreciated, his illustrations unheeded, and his most fervid appeals totally powerless. And this is one of the chief triumphs of eloquence, that it can hush prejudice to rest, and compel admiration from the reluctant. An instance of this kind is related of Whitfield. He was pleading in the old Fourth Street Academy in Philadelphia, for his favorite enterprise, the orphan house at Savannah, when a gentleman who had purposely come unprovided with funds and determined that he would not be moved to give anything, totally subdued by the pathetic earnestness of Whitfield's appeal, turned to his neighbor, a wealthy man, and earnestly solicited the loan of a handsome sum to throw into the collector's box. So also of Richard Baxter, the celebrated non-conformist minister: it is related that having on one occasion, made an appointment to preach, in defiance of the law which forbade him, a neighbouring magistrate, having heard of the arrangement came, attended by constables, and determined to arrest Baxter in the very act of disobedience to law, but stimulated by curiosity, he paused for a few moments to listen to his discourse, and was so charmed by the sweetness of Baxter's manner, and the eloquence of his thoughts, that he totally forgot his harsh purpose, and when the service closed, he invited Baxter to the hospitalities of his house, and became thenceforth his staunch friend. So potent is true eloquence for the mastery of prejudice: but

2d. *It convinces the judgment.*

It is undoubtedly the province of argument to make plain the truth, and to produce conviction of that truth. But unhappily there are many influences at work which avail

to nullify the force of the argument, and to strip even the most cogent reasoning of its power. Disinclination will withhold attention, and prejudice will close the heart against reason. Were men always candid, unbiased, and earnestly intent upon finding and following the truth, irrespective of its bearings upon their interest and their wishes, there would be but little difficulty in producing assent to demonstrable truths. Any person of good sense, and ordinary powers of reasoning, could accomplish the task. But, as it is, great skill is often requisite, and much precautionary movement is to be employed, to woo attention from the reluctant, to hold prejudice in abeyance, and to win upon the feelings, and to enlist the judgment in full, clear, and overwhelming conviction, before adverse influences can reassert their power over the hearer, and effectually blind his judgment. This marvellous power appertains to true eloquence, which makes its approaches gradually, and without exciting alarm awakens admiration and kindles interest by pleasing images and apposite illustrations, until the attention is riveted, and the full stream of argument or of remonstrance is poured upon the expectant mind, and the conclusion bursts upon it with resistless force, bearing down all opposition, and captivating the judgment in strong conviction, and the heart in ready acquiescence. Many a desperate cause has been carried through to a successful issue, by the eloquence of its shrewd and patiently industrious advocate.

Perhaps the triumph of Patrick Henry in the celebrated tythe case in Virginia is as striking an illustration as could be found of the power of eloquence to compel conviction in spite of seeming impossibilities: but,

*3d. Eloquence often avails to vindicate the cause of the oppressed.*

The possession of power, especially absolute power over others, is peculiarly corrupting in its influence, and it tends directly and rapidly to harden the heart. Rarely is the possessor of such power brought to divest himself of it, and not without many a hard and protracted struggle, is it wrested from his grasp. It may well, therefore, be accounted as the highest achievement of eloquence, to vindicate successfully the rights of the oppressed, and relax the grasp of tyranny on its victim.

The long protracted struggle between the British crown for its prerogatives, and the commoners for their privileges and their freedom, elicited some of the noblest efforts of modern eloquence.

Thomas Clarkson, roused (in 1785) by the theme for a

ūniversity prize at Cambridge, “*An liceat invitox in servitū tem dare*,” which was proposed by the Master of Magdalen College, entered upon a series of investigations and efforts which (after a long and hard-fought battle against power, interest and prejudice all combined in support of the odious African slave-trade,) issued in the act of the British Parliament for the abolition of that trade; a measure which, however abortive it may be, in fact, to a certain extent, will ever be regarded as a monument of the power of an honest eloquence in opposition to the strongest passions of human nature.

In like manner, when the poor negro, Someret, whom two years previously he had found sick, deserted of his unfeeling master, and dying of want in the street, but who now, being restored to health and vigor, was claimed by his worthless master as a run-away slave and lodged in jail, Granville Sharpe hastened to the rescue of his protégé, and, in a long hearing before the Lord Mayor Nash, his eloquence baffled the cupidity of the master, and secured the freedom of the deserted slave.

It were, perhaps, hardly fair to cite, as an instance, the case of Moses, the successful advocate of the oppressed at the court of Pharaoh, from whom he extorted a reluctant assent to the departure of the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt, because Moses was aided by supernatural powers; but certainly few are the spectacles that modern times have presented more impressive than was the impeachment of Warren Hastings before the British House of Parliament, by the great orator, Edmund Burke. For hours, aye, for four days in succession, the whole House and a large body of spectators of the highest rank, and the most cultivated mind in the three kingdoms, hung on the lips of the orator, enraptured by his glowing eloquence, of which such was the power, that even the accused himself, though finally acquitted by the House, was heard to declare, “*for half an hour I looked up at the orator, in a reverie of wonder, and during that space, I actually felt myself to be the most culpable man on earth.*”

Mr. Hastings was acquitted, and perhaps deservedly. But the effect of the matchless eloquence of Burke on that memorable occasion has been to check the abuses of power in the East, and extend protection to the helpless. And again, and again, in the presence of monarchs, of nobles and of judges, has the unaided eloquence of an honest advocate vindicated the rights of the oppressed, and brought safety to the defenceless. But

4th. *Eloquence has been known to make the powerful tremble on their very seat of pride.*

A striking illustration of this is found in the effect of the prophet Nathan's visit to the guilty seducer of Bathsheba. Monarch though he was, and clothed with almost despotic power, a brief address from the prophet ending with "*Thou art the man!*" made the royal offender quail, and extorted from him the bitter acknowledgment of his guilt.

Paul also, a prisoner, loaded with irons, when pleading before the Roman governor, spoke so impressively of *righteousness, temperance and a coming judgment*, that Felix trembled on the seat of justice, and hastily dismissed his too eloquent prisoner. The same prisoner, by his inimitable defence before Festus, in the presence of King Agrippa, moved the monarch and his whole court to a conviction of his innocence, and elicited from the stern Roman himself an open attestation to the power of his eloquence.

Of the celebrated French orator, Massillon, it is related, that on one occasion his royal hearer, Louis XIV. said to him, " *Father ! when others preach before me, I am sometimes moved with admiration of their powers of oratory,—but when I hear you, I always find reason to be dissatisfied with myself !*" A rare instance of genuine eloquence, which, absorbed with its subject, loses sight of self, and fills its hearers wholly with the subject and the subject alone.

It was the unwearied exertions, the bold daring, and the impetuous eloquence of Demosthenes, the Athenian orator, that alone checked the ambitious schemes of Philip, king of Macedon, the most powerful and enterprising monarch of the age.

But, perhaps, no more striking exemplification of this power can any where be found, than is furnished in the closing scene of the daring career of Robespierre. Unexpectedly attacked in the Assembly with charges of corruption, cruelty and baseness, by Tallien, such was the impetuous eloquence of the accuser, that Robespierre, till then, a very Dictator in the Republic, started from his seat, his features pale and distorted with uncontrollable agitation. He found himself suddenly denounced, deserted, helpless ; and he yielded abjectly to the fate his crimes had merited. One blow from the spirit of true eloquence, and the monster-tyrant, who had so long ruled the destinies of his country, and whose foot had been placed upon the neck of prostrate France, and almost of Europe, was precipitately hurled from his seat of absolute power, and hurled thence for ever !

But, 5. *Eloquence can arouse, and it can allay, even the fierce passions of a tumultuous mob.*

This has been repeatedly effected in times of great political excitement.

During the progress of the French revolution, the popular orators, (often rude and boisterous, it is true,) yet did exhibit, at times, powers of eloquence wonderfully effective, directing the tide of popular excitement, and swaying the determination even of the ferocious mob at their pleasure. The poor abbé, who, when the Parisian mob were preparing to hang him to the lamp chain in the open street, uttered a broad joke that took the popular ear, and induced the mob to release him amid shouts of laughter,—did, in that one joke, give forth a burst of eloquence. He understood his own position, and the humour of his blood-thirsty captors, and he spoke appropriately and with effect: but so to speak, is eloquence.

Peter, the hermit, during the pontificate of Pope Urban II., travelled all over Europe, describing the indignities practised by the Turks in Palestine on believers, and calling on christians every where to rally around the standard he raised for the rescue of the Holy Land from the infidels. So humble was his demeanour, so saintly his appearance, and so vehement his eloquence, that he gathered an army of 60,000 men, with whom he marched to Jerusalem: and he kindled throughout Europe that ardent spirit, which, for ages, found busy employment in the crusades against the infidels.

Another striking illustration of this power is furnished in ancient history. L. Sylla, in the midst of battle, finding his troops giving way before the forces of Mithridates, dismounted, seized a standard and reared it in the midst of the enemy, crying out to his retreating soldiers, “*Here, Romans! it is that I shall stand, and here I'll die! Report your General left in front of the enemy!*” This appeal was enough; his army rallied, drove back the enemy, and remained masters of the field.

It is also asserted, that Zeno Eleates, pitying the sufferings of the Agrigentines, from the tyranny of Phalaris, their king, attempted to reason the tyrant into mercy; but he failed. He then sought to rouse the nobles to a sense of their degradation; but in vain. Being then summoned to the presence of the tyrant, who was surrounded by his trembling nobles, Zeno disdained to answer the questions of Phalaris, but turning to these nobles, he reproached them with their pusillanimity in terms so keen, that stung to the quick, they roused themselves to sudden action, and stoned on the spot, the very tyrant before whose power they, but

a moment before, were trembling. Such is the potency of a genuine, fervid eloquence.

Moreover. 6. *Eloquence is the key to influence and distinction, especially under a liberal government.*

What would Demosthenes have been, but for the impressive oratory he so painfully and studiously acquired? This it was that enabled him to arouse his countrymen, and to awe even the daring Philip of Macedon.

It was by the force of his commanding eloquence, that Pericles ruled his country with almost despotic sway, and compelled even his ablest opponents to bow to his superiority, and that even in the hour of their temporary triumph; for it is said, that such was the skill of Pericles as an orator, that even when defeated in argument, the spectators actually believed him victorious.

To the powers of his oratory, it was that Cicero owed his victory over the conspirator, Cataline, his influence as a Roman magistrate, and his lasting reputation in the world of literature.

To what, other than the combination of noble qualities that go to form the finished orator, do such names as Chatham, Walpole, Fox, Pitt, Canning and Brougham owe their celebrity,—or what, apart from their eloquence, elevated the men who bore those names to the stations of commanding influence they so ably filled? Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Massillon, Bourdaloue, Whitfield, Davies, Larned, Summerfield, Channing and Chalmers among divines,—Grattan, Erskine, Patrick Henry and Wirt among lawyers,—all owe their fame to their eloquence in the use of the stores of information they had amassed. It was the fascinating charm of his simple but beautiful oratory that sent Theodore Frelinghuysen to the United States Senate, and sent Everett to the court of London,—and that has placed each of these distinguished men in the presidential chair of a learned university.

It is eloquence in debate, combined with their large statesman-like views, that has filled the British empire with the reputation of Sir Robert Peel, and France with admiration for the talents of M. Thiers and M. Guizot:—and it is this also, that has filled our vast country with the fame of McDuffie, Berrien, Gaston, Lumpkin, Calhoun, Crittenden, Daniel Webster and Henry Clay. The two last named, both sons of respectable families in humble circumstances, have been the artificers of their own fortunes: and by industrious research, and the force of true genius, have risen step by step, from obscurity to be the leaders in their country's councils, the most popular orators of North America,

known, respected and admired throughout the length and breadth of their own great country, and throughout the whole civilized world. Let such a man as Calhoun, Webster or Henry Clay, recommend or advocate a measure, bearing on any great public interest, and it commands, at once, the profound attention of enlightened statesmen on both sides of the Atlantic.

An upright, generous-hearted, and thoroughly finished orator, is no unfit image of the benevolent power of heaven. He pours the full stream of light on points where previously, thick darkness brooded. He dissipates prejudice, overcomes obduracy, convinces the judgment, and captivates the reluctant heart. He stands forth in modest dignity, as the reprobate of vice, the advocate of the weak, the vindicator of the oppressed. By the calm majesty of truth, he causes the great to tremble in the very seat of their power; he fearlessly breasts the torrent of popular commotion, and effectually controls the fierce passions of the multitude, bending them to his views, and directing the exertion of their tremendous power for purposes of good, not evil; and while accomplishing all this, he holds at command the key to influence, honor and power, in the community around him. He is the idol of his friends, the admiration of his country, an honour to human nature. Like the majestic live-oak of our own coasts, he springs from the soil, and remains true to his place, adapting himself to his position and to the varying circumstances passing around him; and as he gradually out-tops his contemporaries, and towers higher and yet higher towards heaven, he remains ever natural, graceful and majestic; affording shelter to those who seek it, and yielding delight to every eye—the pride of the landscape, an object conspicuous far and near for its lofty beauty and its easy grace.

In drawing to a close, may I not be permitted to aver

1. *The attainment of eloquence, is an object of noble ambition.*

There is nothing selfish, nothing base or ignoble in the desire for this attainment. If we consider the varied knowledge, the refined taste, the command of language, the elegance of diction, and the grace of manner, together with all the fine qualities mental and moral both, which go to make up the accomplished orator; besides the power for good which this noble attainment confers upon its possessor, we cannot but admit that it is a possession greatly desirable. How gratifying it must be to a generous heart, to be conscious of a power, the exertion of which, on appropriate occasions, shall not only win renown, and open the

way to influence, honour, and probably wealth too, but which shall lead to this distinction through exertions which strengthen the powers employed, and at the same time extend protection to oppressed virtue, relief to suffering innocence; which shall unmask villainy, disarm reckless power, and which *may possibly* save one's country from disaster, and guide her through scenes of threatening danger and impending disgrace, to safety, honour, peace, and lasting prosperity, and plant the wreath of solid and enduring fame on one's own brow ! The attainment of such power is worthy of the noblest aspirations of the noblest spirits amongst us. The gift of genuine eloquence to a truly good man, be his place at the bar, in the halls of legislation, or even in the pulpit, gives a finishing grace to every other excellence, and renders him an ornament to society, a blessing to his friends, and an honour to his country.

Obviously then, I may add, 2d, and in conclusion, *To secure this gift, no pains should be spared by our youth, no requisite instruction should be withheld, in our seminaries of learning.*

The foundation for eloquence must be laid in purity of character, and in the acquisition of sound knowledge and varied information. These are indeed, indispensable to full success in almost any pursuit, but more especially so to the orator. Pure morals and a generous spirit prompting to action, will render the treasures of knowledge always available. No branch of knowledge can be named, that is not connected with all other knowledge ; none that may not be used to elucidate points bearing, apparently, no relation to it.

Be eager for knowledge then, young gentlemen ! Drink it in from every source. Let your thirst for it be insatiable !

Moreover, the graces of composition, and the due management of the voice and person, to ensure a distinct enunciation, easy and harmonious intonation, appropriate action, and a delivery at once graceful and impressive, should be aspired after with unwearied effort and with ceaseless care !

To further these efforts should be a leading object in all our seminaries of learning ; each one of which should furnish to its students a professor competent to the task of training them to oratory ; himself a man of sound learning, large views, and at least, a good and impressive speaker, if not a faultless model of graceful oratory.

I thus insist upon distinctness of enunciation and a graceful delivery, because, they are in truth, of vital importance to success. It is well known what pains were taken by

Demosthenes and other great orators of antiquity, to conquer the defects of nature, strengthen a weak voice, and to acquire the arts of composing accurately, and of speaking impressively. And who does not bear in mind the reply of the great orator to one who inquired of him, what is the first qualification, essential to a good orator? He answered *Action!* And the second? *Action!* And the third essential? Still the answer was, *action, action, ACTION.* And there are few of us but must have had occasion to notice that even a well-written address loses more than half its power, and actually wearies the auditory, simply because delivered badly; with utterance indistinct, tones unmusical, and manner heavy and ungainly: while another production, really inferior in merit, and presenting far less thought, and less accurate scholarship, shall be well received; listened to eagerly, and be followed by warm applause, merely because it was well and gracefully delivered.

In this country, as under all liberal governments, a good speaker readily gains the popular ear. Eloquence, it is, therefore, that opens the road to distinction and influence; and it is due to our youth, it is due to ourselves, it is due to our country, that every institution which professes to give to its students a good and finished education, should furnish them with appropriate instruction at least, in all that is requisite to their becoming good orators; yea, it should if possible, place before them, in the instructor himself, a model of chaste and impressive eloquence.

Such a policy, would breathe new life into our literary institutions. It would give a new impulse to zeal in the pursuit of every branch of learning. It would contribute greatly to elevate the standard of national intelligence, it would increase the number and augment the power of our orators and it would impart new dignity to the deliberations of our public bodies. It would promote refinement at home, and command for us yet greater respect abroad.

For the attainment of such an object, no pains should be spared—no expense refused. And happy and honoured pre-eminently, (I will venture to affirm,) will be that College that shall set the example, and offer such inducements as shall call into her service for this special department, some one of the great orators of our land; one universally admitted to be a *model of eloquence*, entitled to the confidence of all, and competent to awaken the admiration of our sons, and to arouse a noble ambition in our American youth.